



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Craig, CO	Accident Number:	CEN20LA160
Date & Time:	04/23/2020, 2139 MDT	Registration:	N601X
Aircraft:	Piper PA60	Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

On April 23, 2020, at 2139 mountain daylight time (MDT), radar contact was lost with a Piper Aerostar 601X, N601X. The airplane was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Craig, Colorado. The uncertificated (student rated) pilot sustained fatal injuries. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

The airplane was not equipped with automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B), which was required for operations in airspace that included class E airspace at or above 10,000 ft. The flight had not been operating on a flight plan and had no communications with air traffic control as required when it operated in class A airspace above 18,000 ft. Aircraft maintenance logbooks showed that the airplane received its last regulatory annual inspection dated November 21, 2019, and its last altimeter inspection, up to 30,000 ft, was dated June 27, 2014.

Radar track data indicated that N601X departed Jersey Shore Airport (P96), Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania, about 1119 MDT, flying westbound at a cruise altitude of about 3,500 feet msl and had an average ground speed of about 180 - 190 kts until stopping at Findlay Airport (FDY), Findlay, Ohio, about 1251 MDT. Track data indicates N601X departed FDY about 1337 MDT, flying westbound at an altitude of about 3,500 ft, climbed once to about 5,500 ft, then descended to about 3,500 ft until later climbing to a cruise altitude of between 8,500-9,500 ft before descending into and landing at Red Oak Municipal Airport (RDK), Red Oak, Iowa, about 1618 MDT. Track data indicates N601X likely departed RDK about 1708 MDT, continuing westbound again, climbing to a maximum cruise altitude of about 9,500 ft, then descended and landed at Northern Colorado Regional Airport (FNL), Ft Collins/Loveland, Colorado, about 1949 MDT.

A line service technician employed by a fixed base operator (FBO) at FNL stated that he was sitting in the line shack when he saw N601X taxi from the runway. He said the airplane's right engine was not running, and the pilot was trying to start it. The engine did not restart, and the airplane continued to taxi to the ramp. He asked the pilot if everything was "okay," and the pilot said, "yeah cut it a little close on fuel." He said the airplane was leaning "quite a bit" toward the right, which he attributed to a fuel imbalance. The line service technician said there was "a lot" of fuel staining under the right wing and on top of the wing. He did not look at the

left wing and did not know if the left wing had fuel stains. He said he looked in the airplane and did not see it equipped with ADS-B; he said that he did not know how the pilot was going to fly over the mountains. He said the airplane was equipped with a panel mounted Garmin 430 and a transponder with round knobs. He said he saw an oxygen tank in the airplane and did not know the amount of oxygen that was present in the tank. The line service technician said the airplane did not have a pressurization system. The line service technician said he topped of all three fuel tanks: left wing, right wing and fuselage tank. He said during fueling of left tank, he had to push up the right wing up because it was leaning downward. The pilot told him to make sure that the fuel tank cap on the fuselage was on tight because "the thing leaks." The line service technician said he double checked the fuselage fuel tank cap, and it was on "tight." The line service technician said the engines sounded fine except for the pilot running out of fuel during the after-landing taxi. He did not think the airplane was in "very good" condition.

A customer service representative at the FBO stated the pilot told her he purchased the airplane in New York and was "going to try to get over the mountains." The pilot said he flew on a commercial flight from California and on the same day he purchased the airplane. He said he had to go over the mountains and through Utah and was destined to California. She said the pilot was "really tired" and did not have cash to buy Red Bull, so she made him coffee. The pilot told her that he left New York later than he wanted too because he was talking with the former airplane owner. He told her the airplane was his fifth airplane that he owned.

Radar track data indicates N601X departed FNL about 2037 MDT turning westbound, climbing through about 12,000 ft, and made a left, almost 360° turn, continuing to climb throughout the turn, then flying west/southwest bound and reaching about 16,000 ft. The airplane continued west/southwest for a little over 40 miles climbing again and reaching about 22,000 ft, then turning right about 90° flying northbound, momentarily, before turning left and heading west/northwest and descending to about 20,000 ft, then back up again to about 22,000 ft, briefly, then back down to about 20,000 ft. The airplane then turned left to the southwest, then southbound, entering erratic flight climbing to over 23,000 ft, momentarily, before beginning to descend, entering a tight looping turn to the left and losing altitude rapidly, then showing a west/northwest heading in the final segment before track data was lost at about 2139 MDT.

An alert notice was issued, and the airplane wreckage was located by the Colorado State Highway Patrol on April 24, 2020, about 0336 MDT, about 15 miles west of Craig, Colorado.

Aircraft registry records showed that the pilot also owned a Cessna 310Q, N7742Q, which was based at San Martin Airport, near San Martin, California.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N601X
Model/Series:	PA60 601	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Amateur Built:	No		
Operator:	Pilot	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:		Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	CAG, 6198 ft msl	Observation Time:	2053 MDT
Distance from Accident Site:	15 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	7°C / 2°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	14 knots / , 270°
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 6000 ft agl	Visibility:	10 Miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.02 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Ft Collins, CO (FNL)	Destination:	, CA

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	40.951944, -108.340278 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Mitchell F Gallo
Additional Participating Persons:	Kent Gibbons; Federal Aviation Administration; FSDO; Salt Lake City, UT
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.